

Faith Is Action

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**THE LORD IS
MY SHEPHERD**



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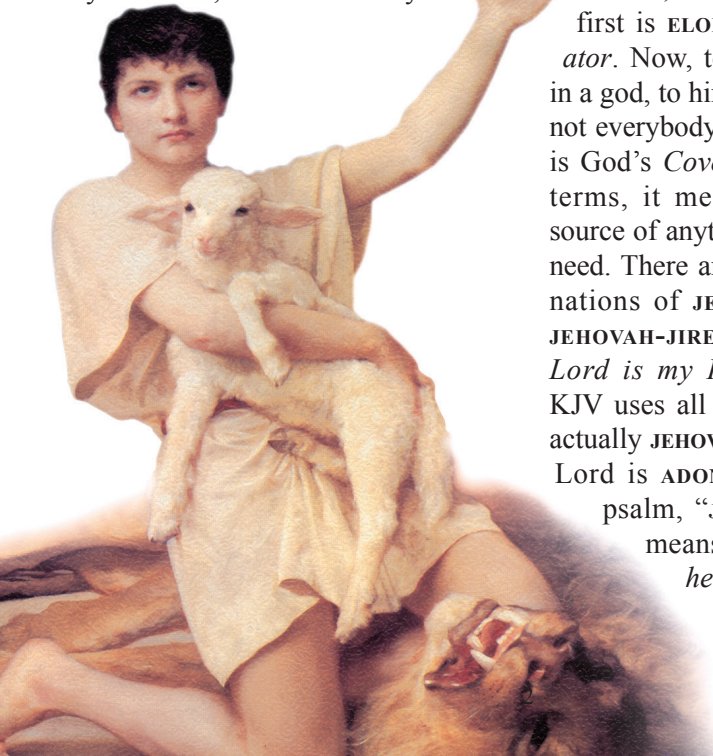
R. L. Hardy

The most quoted passage in the Bible is the *Twenty-Third Psalm*. Many of us could probably recite most of it from our childhood. Written by the loving shepherd, *David*, it portrays poetically and definitively the relationship between God and His people.

I have often said, and it is true: If I did not know any other Scriptures in the Word of God but Psalm 23, I would be delivered from all of my enemies, have all of my

bills paid, my needs supplied, be healed of all of my diseases, and be blessed with the fellowship of the Lord! In this one Psalm are *seven of the covenant names of Jehovah*. **JEHOVAH** means "*The Covenant God*," and can be translated: "I Am that I Am: I Am the Covenant God." (This literally means: "*I will be what I was, because I Am!*")

In the Old Testament, there are two Hebrew words that are translated *God, Lord, and Lord God*. The first is **ELOHIM** which means *Creator*. Now, to anyone who believes in a god, to him god is his creator, but not everybody's god is **JEHOVAH**. This is God's *Covenant Name*. In simple terms, it means: *I Am!* He is the source of anything and everything we need. There are about sixteen combinations of **JEHOVAH** titles, such as **JEHOVAH-JIREH** which means "*The Lord is my Provider*." (When the KJV uses all capitals for **LORD**, it is actually **JEHOVAH** in Hebrew, whereas Lord is **ADONAI**.) David began his psalm, "**JEHOVAH-ROEH**," which means "*JEHOVA is my Shepherd*."



The Shepherd's Heart

David had the heart of a shepherd. He loved his father's sheep, and he never lost any of them. He delivered them from the lion's jaw and the bear's paw. A shepherd is a *keeper of sheep: He watches over, protects, and guides the sheep.* The nature of sheep is to go astray when left unguarded. David likened the people of God to sheep, which was something he knew a lot about. In Psalm 100:3 he said, "*We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*" Isaiah described the erring nature of man in Isaiah 53:6, "*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way...*"

Without a shepherd, without someone to lead them, feed them, give them water to drink, and protect them from predators, the sheep would very quickly lose their way, would die from starvation, thirst, or be devoured by wild beasts. As a shepherd, David had provided for all these needs for his father's sheep, and in so doing, he had come to realize that our Father God is the Provider and Protector of His own. There are endless blessings to be found in just the first five words of his psalm:

"The Lord is my shepherd..."

The first thing I realize whenever I say "*The Lord is my shepherd*" is, *He is leading me!* And if He is leading me, and *I am following Him*, then wherever I am, He has led me here. Therefore, I need not be troubled by any surrounding circumstances that may seem threatening to me, because

if Jesus is leading me, I am safe in His care. Now if one finds himself in a situation that the child of God ought not to be in: God did not lead him there. The problem is *he was not following the Shepherd.* He went his own way and got himself into trouble. But when one is following the Lord, wherever he is, the Lord has led him there, and the Lord is there, and He will deliver.

As a faithful provider and shepherd of his father's flock, David's first understanding of Jehovah as his Shepherd, caused him to declare: "*I shall not want! I shall not lack! I shall not be in need!*" The Hebrew means *not to lack.* It does **not** mean that *you will not want for anything*, but that *you will not be in need.* In other words: "The Lord is my Shepherd; *I have everything I need!*" Because it is the *shepherd's responsibility* to provide the tableland, and the green pastures, and the calm drinking waters for the sheep! It's the shepherd's job—not the sheep's!

David knew this. The sheep don't go out and hunt for green pastures for grazing. David didn't get up in the morning and say to his father's sheep, "All right now, get out there and find your pasture for the day." As the shepherd, this was *his responsibility.* While the sheep are nestled warmly in the safety of the sheepfold, the shepherd rises up early in the morning and searches out the green pasture for the day's grazing. And when he has found the good green table land, and has scouted out the

watering streams, because he knows the bright morning sun is going to heat up in the middle of the day, and the sheep are going to get hot and thirsty, and when he has scouted out the dens and lairs of the lion and the wild beasts, *then* he returns to the sheepfold to gather them and start out on their sojourn for the day.

When their shepherd returns, his sheep know that they are going to have their needs supplied that day, because their shepherd has sought out the pasture lands to prepare the table before them. God prepares the table for His sheep, *“And even in the presence of the enemy!”* I don’t care if the enemy is all around me, he can’t stop me from eating! He can’t stop me from enjoying God’s blessings! And I don’t have to worry about running out either, because My Shepherd has already made provision to find the good pastures where there is ample food for His sheep. The shepherd does not wait until he has led the sheep into grazing to scout out the grass lands, or they might run out of food and become weak and sick. No, he has made provision for them while they were safe in the fold, and protected from all harm.

Paul said, *“But my God shall supply all of your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus”* (Phil. 4:19). So why are you shook up when a need comes? What do you do when a need comes? You go to the Shepherd. You go to the provider. You tell Him, “I need this, God.” God says, “I knew it before you came. I

have the answer in process. Just praise Me, hang in there, and don’t cast away your faith. Just wait on it. It’s on the way. It’s going to come.”

Jesus told us in Matt. 6:7-8: *“But when you pray, use not vain repetitions as do the heathen do: for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be ye not therefore like unto them: for your Father knows what things you have need of before you ask him.”*

He Makes Me To Lie Down In Green Pastures

The shepherd must take care that the grass is plentiful, because when the sheep eat, unlike cows, they eat all the way down to the ground, and leave nothing. David said, *“He makes me to lie down in green pastures.”* This makes me think of the green, green grass of spring when the April rains have watered the ground, and that first spring grass appears. In no time the grass is high, green, and lush. I get out there with the lawn mower to cut it, and after about two swipes, that juicy, wet grass has clogged the blade, and I have to stop and unclog it, over and over. It is so thick and lush and green.

Child of God, God will take you into the *green pastures* and feed you, and not only that, He will make you to *lie down* in the green pastures. One thing about sheep: A sheep will eat and eat until he is full, and when he gets full, he will fall down. In fact, a sheep will not lie down until he is full. God is going to supply our needs

until we are filled up, and then He is going to let us lie down in the green pastures. This means there is a lot more grass left to take care of us when we get finished digesting what we have already eaten.

If you are following the Lord, He is leading you and guiding you into the green pastures of satisfaction and blessing. God told his people, *“If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land...”* (Isa. 1:19).

If one is not eating the good of the land, either he is not willing, or he is not obedient, but if he will obey and follow the Shepherd, He will lead him into the green pastures that He has prepared for His own. We have to keep following Him! Like the Children of Israel in their exodus out of Egypt, we have come out of Egypt, and we are on a journey through the wilderness on our way to the Promised Land. God will supply our needs by a miracle. He can open the Heavens and rain down bread, and if He has to, He can bring water out of the rock, but He is going to take care of us! He said in His Word: *“Bread shall be given, and your water sure.”*

I Am The Good Shepherd

Out on the back side of the mountain, tending to his father’s sheep, David would pass time playing his lyre and singing unto Jehovah, and one day God began to speak to his heart in revelation, and he picked up that lyre and began to sing, *“The Lord—Jehovah is my Shepherd; I shall not want!”* He knew how much

he loved his father’s sheep, and how caring and protective he was to them, and how he had risked his own life to deliver them out of the mouth of the lion and the paw of the bear, and he began to realize *God is the Great Shepherd!*

In John 10:11, Jesus declared: *“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep.”* Jesus said that if anybody had to die, the Shepherd would die; but the sheep will live. In verse 15, He said, *“I lay down my life for the sheep,”* and Jesus died for the sheep, because He said, *“I am come that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly”* (Jn. 10:10).

Child of God, you should not be *in want, in need, lacking the necessary things of life*, if you are following the Shepherd. He has promised to give you abundant life in the green pastures and still waters of His kingdom. Jesus said that nothing was more important than the welfare of the sheep. If He laid His life down for the sheep, do you mean to tell me that He is going to withhold silver and gold, bread, clothing, houses, and our daily needs? No, He is going to supply the needs of the sheep and *satisfy them until they do not lack!*

The functions of sheep are to *produce wool and bring forth lambs*. The sheep produce lambs—not the shepherd. I believe God’s sheep are to be so well fed and blessed that they can take care of the House of God, and go out and bring the sinners in to be saved. God wants to bless

His people financially so they can pay their tithes and give to His work and get the Gospel out, and bring the new lambs in!

(While I am on this point, let me say, *It is a privilege to be able to pay tithes*. Some people think it's a hard thing to give God their tithes, but they need to thank God *they have a job and can earn a wage to pay tithes on!* I get a lot of letters from people saying, "Brother Hardy, pray that I get a job, and I'll pay my tithes to the Lord.")

He Restores My Soul

One of the most misunderstood words in the Bible is *soul*, because it has a double meaning. We always think of it as part of our *inner man: soul and spirit*. But in many places, and this is one, it simply means *life*. The sheep are hot and exhausted. They couldn't go another mile, and the shepherd knows that. He knows just how far to take them through the desert. They are dehydrated, so he gives them the water to renew their strength. If you have seen a marathon, on the race way, are people handing out water to the runners, because when you lose water, you dehydrate, and you are losing your life.

God, with the sweet water of His Word, restores your life. You have been in a hard, hot place, and the devil is talking to you. The sheep says, "We're going to die." Israel said to Moses, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you brought us out here to die?" They

were looking at the natural and not the spiritual. There wasn't any water in the natural. There was sand and a blazing sun, but God said, "I will make a way where there seems to be no way." The way, most of the time, is through the most unlikely source. God will use somebody or something that you never believed He would use. God led the children of Israel to a rock. God told Moses to strike the rock with his rod, and *out came water!* They were on the verge of dehydration and death, but He restored their life!

He Leads Me Beside The Still Waters

Still waters are peaceful. Still waters are waters of blessings and refreshing. On the other hand, *turbulent waters or muddy waters* represent trouble, danger, and cursings. God is not going to lead His sheep into an eddy or whirlpool of danger, but beside waters of *peace and safety*. When they have been satisfied with the lush green grass that He has searched out for them, and have drunk to their satisfaction of the clear clean waters that He has led them to, they proclaim: "*He restores my soul.*"

He is not going to lead us into a place where there is turmoil. Some people's lives are nothing but turmoil. One of the main reasons is, they are presumptuous, and they do their own will. When you do your own will, you have to pay the price for it. In my beginning, I was like that, and I did my own will. I justified myself in doing it, and then

when trouble came, I would run to the Lord and bellyache. He would say, “Did you ask me if you should do this?” When some people get into a mess, I ask them, “Did the Lord tell you to do it?” They say, “No.” I say, “There’s your problem.”

We are told in Proverbs 3:5-6: *“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not on thine own understanding; and in all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy path.”*

God leads us into the land of restoration. We have come out of the world and its tribulation, and we are following our Shepherd into the green pastures where He satisfies our material needs, restores and renews our spiritual life, and we walk in newness of life with Him. There are many perils along this journey, and many snares and pitfalls await the unknowing, but...

He Leads Me In The Paths Of Righteousness

God doesn’t lead you into the world or into compromising situations. He leads you to the **prayer room**. He leads you **to church**. When you get outside of the safety of the fold, you are prey for the enemy. The sheep do not have to worry about becoming lost or in danger as long as they follow the Shepherd. He will lead them into the right paths where they will not stumble, be injured, or go astray. On their own, they are easy prey for the wild beasts of the field, or to lose their way and perhaps fall

into a snare or hidden ravine and break their legs and die. But following the Shepherd, they will walk in the *right paths of blessing and safety*.

Follow The Leader!

Our journey is called *Follow the Leader*. We must follow the Lord. We must follow the Shepherd. Paul said in Hebrews 12:2: *“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith...”* The Greek terms can be translated: “The leader and completer.” We are following the Holy Ghost who will lead and guide us into *all truth*. Jesus warned us of those *other shepherds* who are wolves in sheep’s clothing: They are *strangers to His real sheep*, and they will not follow them.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that enters not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.

But he that enters in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

To him the porter opens; and the sheep hear his voice (the shepherd’s voice): and he calls his own sheep by name, and he leads them out.

And when he puts forth his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers” (John 10:1-5).

Jesus knows *His real sheep*, and His real sheep *know His voice!* God’s sheep do not follow the voice of

strangers. The Lord really opened these verses up to me on a Holy Land tour. We saw many flocks of sheep with their shepherds on the hillsides, but two instances were special.

Along one hillside were many sheep grazing, and some of them had similar black marks on them. We inquired why some were marked so, and our guide explained that those sheep were marked so that their keeper could tell them apart from the other flocks. You see, *he was not their shepherd*. He was a *hired sheep watcher*, and they did not know *his voice*. Therefore, they would not come when he called them.

This was further illustrated while we sat on our tour bus between stops. We were at a place where once a week the shepherders gathered to buy and sell their sheep. We were surrounded by dozens of sheep who were confused and bewildered. We watched as one man, who had just bought some sheep, tried desperately and futilely to get the sheep to follow him. He knew that if he could get *one* of the sheep to follow him, the others would fall behind him, so he was trying with all of his might to move that one sheep, but to no avail. He tugged and pulled, and even tried to pick the sheep up, but that sheep would not move. He reminded me more of a mule than a sheep! But you see, to those sheep, that man was a *stranger*, and they did not know *his voice*, and they would not follow him!

Our Shepherd is greater than

David, and David never lost any of his sheep. When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane He prayed an intercessory prayer for His sheep. He was waiting to go to Pilate's whipping post to suffer, and Calvary to die, but *He was praying for you and me*. He said, "*Father, I never lost one of these You gave Me. The only one who's lost is the son of perdition that the Scripture might be fulfilled*" (Ref. John 17:12). He could have said, "But all the rest, even Peter, we didn't lose. We didn't lose the big fisherman. He came close, but we didn't lose him."

While they were in the upper room together, He wanted to let Peter know, "*Even though you're going to deny Me three times, I have prayed for you, that your faith doesn't fail...*" (Lk. 22:31-34). He didn't say that He prayed that God would give him more faith. No, but that he would not allow guilt and shame to overwhelm him in that moment, but would repent, "*And when you are converted, strengthen your brethren*" (vs. 32).

Yea, Though I Walk Through...

"*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me...*" The key word in this verse is *through*. We are going to walk *through the valley*, but we are not going to stay there. Death cannot keep the Child of God there. The Shepherd assures us safe passage through this valley, and we fear no

evil, because we are not alone. His close companionship will watch and protect us.

I found out there cannot be a *shadow* without *light*. I know that the valley of the shadow of death is not dark, because the Light is there, and He outshines the darkness! God promised me in His Word that my “*darkness would be as the noon day,*” and that’s when the sun is at its highest peak! Oh, I may see the shadow of death, but I can also see the shadow of My Shepherd, and in His hands are His “*rod and the staff which comfort me.*”

Whenever the enemy or beasts of prey are threatening, the shepherd gets out his rod and raises it high. With the *rod* he defends and protects the sheep, and with the *staff* he aids them when they are in need. Should one little lamb stumble and get caught in the rocks or cleft of the rock, the shepherd reaches down with the crook of his staff and pulls him out. Should any of the sheep start to stray or pull away from the flock, the shepherd reaches out with the rod and the staff and presses him in the side until he turns back into the right direction with the others.

You see, in order to get to the table land that the shepherd has prepared, they often have to climb through rugged terrain where there may be narrow passages and dangerous places where beasts of prey are lurking, but the shepherd has searched all of this out beforehand, and he knows the way. In the winter,

they usually eat high up on the mountains where the grass is still growing on the tops, and then when the rains have come and watered the dry earth, they find grass further down near the valleys. Often the valley lies deep between two mountains, and it is a treacherous journey there, but following the shepherd they do not fear, for he will lead them *safety through!*

In The Presence Of Mine Enemies

“*You prepare a table before me in the presence of mine enemies...*” The shepherd has already searched out where the beasts of prey are hidden, and he has taken care to block up the entrances to their dens with rocks. And right there in their very presence, right under their very noses, as it were, he leads his sheep into the green grass where they eat to their full, and the little lambs play till they are tired. The shepherd knows that the wolf and the other beasts of prey are also looking for the green pastures, because they know that the sheep will come there to graze. They too have scouted out the land to find a cave or hiding place close by to make their dens, where they will wait until the shepherd has fallen asleep, to sneak out and devour the helpless lambs.

Hiding in the dark corners of the cave, all of a sudden the sleeping wolf or lion gets a whiff of supper: “*Lamb chops tonight,*” his nose tells him. Then he strains his ears to hear the bleating of the sheep as they frolic with the lambs in the green pas-

tures. Those little lambs do not fear any danger. They just eat and play to their hearts' content. Mamma Sheep is there, *and the Shepherd is there*, so they romp around in the soft green grass, all the while moving a little closer to the cave where that ole wolf or lion waits.

That ole lion's mouth is watering now, and he raises up on all fours and readies himself to make a charge for the mouth of the cave. With the grace of a cat, he leaps forward and runs smack into the rocks that the shepherd has placed there. He falls backward with a thud, and one of the little lambs, chewing on a mouthful of grass, hops up to the mouth of the cave and curiously peers in between the cracks of the rocks at the fearsome lion. Then undisturbed, he turns and rollicks back to join the rest of the flock.

God will prepare a table before us right in the presence of the enemy! The devil may *smell* lamb chops, but he is not going to *eat them!* Hallelujah, Jesus is my Rock, and He is my Shepherd, and He is going to supply all of my needs, and protect me from the devourer! The Word says, "*Your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion walks about seeking whom he may devour*" (James 4:7). Be he cannot devour me as long as I am in the safety of the sheep fold.

Anoint My Head With Oil

Anointing the head of the sheep with oil is one of the protective and *comforting* tasks that the shepherd

does for his sheep and serves a two-fold purpose: Sometimes the flies in the Middle East are very bad, and they are a severe threat to the health of the sheep. The flies crawl into the noses of the sheep where they lay their eggs. The larvae infest the nasal passages deep up into their heads. This causes such an aggravation and irritation to the sheep that they will beat their heads and faces against anything they can. Understandably, they often harm or kill themselves as a result.

The shepherd will mix a solution of oil and sulfur to anoint their heads, and he allows it to run down into their faces to cover them. This will ward off the vexing flies that would drive them to their destruction.

Another condition contracted by the sheep that can be prevented by the anointing of their heads is *scabies*. This occurs from the sheep rubbing their heads together. When they do this, they transmit these infectious sores to one another, and they can spread quickly throughout the whole flock, if not checked right away, it can only be cured by dipping every sheep and lamb into a large vat of a special solution. Anointing their heads with oil provides a protective covering for them and prevents outbreaks of the infectious disease.

We need the covering and anointing of the Holy Spirit to guard us against the evil spirits and wicked influences around us! We are living in a day when like Lot, "we are vexed by the filthy conversations"

and vileness of our surroundings. (2 Pet. 2:7-8). The anointing of God will destroy the yoke of Satan and drive out the evil spirits.

As a shepherd of a large church, I have often seen the destruction and chaos that occurs in a church when a few grumblers and fault-finders start *rubbing their heads together!* Left uncorrected, their disgruntled, carnal, evil whisperings will spread like wild fire and threaten to split the whole church. I let the Holy Ghost put the anointing on me, and we get out there and start letting it flow. When God's sheep have their vessels full of the spirit and their heads covered with the anointing, they are immune to the diseases of the carnal man.

My Cup Runs Over

The shepherd always provides the watering place for his sheep beforehand, but sometimes the water is flowing down the mountainsides from streams far above. It is difficult for the sheep to drink from a fast water flow down the side of a rock, so the shepherd always carries a large cup that he places up against the rock. The cup fills up and begins to *run over*, and the sheep can drink from the fountain that flows out of the cup.

Even in the wilderness, God can bring water out of the rock to satisfy the thirst and needs of His sheep, and there will be plenty to drink. He promised in His Word: "*Hunger and thirst after righteousness, and you shall be filled*" (Matt. 5:6).

Jesus is my Shepherd. He is leading me, and I am following Him, and "*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.*" I am not afraid of the devil, and what he would like to do to me if he could: He can't, because *goodness and mercy* are my protectors, and Jesus is my Shepherd! Everything that David said in this psalm about the Lord our Shepherd is stated in the New Testament and in even stronger terms. I know that He will lead me safely through the valleys and upon the mountains of my journey. And when I come to that valley of the shadow of death, He will take me through with victory:

"And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."